COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Energy Subcommittee Ranking Member Randy Weber

Energy Subcommittee Hearing: Advancing the Next Generation of Solar and Wind Energy Technologies

May 15, 2019

Thank you, Chairman Lamb, for holding today's subcommittee hearing. I'm looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about the value of the state of solar and wind technologies in the U.S., and about DOE's clean energy research, development, demonstration and commercialization activities in these areas.

Solar and wind R&D is funded through the Department's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

After substantial growth during the Obama Administration, EERE is by far the largest applied research program.

At almost $2.4 billion in annual funding, EERE is bigger today than the funding provided for research in fossil energy, nuclear energy, electricity, and cybersecurity combined.

The research programs for solar and wind also expanded during this unprecedented growth in spending. So I'm surprised to see my colleagues on the other side of the aisle propose legislation to grow these offices even more – with an almost 60% increase in spending for wind R&D and almost 30% increase in solar R&D.

Now, I want to be clear – I'm supportive of DOE funding for innovative research in new solar and wind technologies.

I'm also supportive of the kind of basic research – like advanced computing, machine learning and advanced manufacturing, and the development of new materials – that benefits not just solar and wind, but all forms of energy technologies.

But we need to take a responsible and balanced approach to energy research and ensure that federal investments go towards work that truly could not be accomplished by the private sector. And in the private sector, business is booming for wind and solar.

Last year, American renewable energy produced a record 742 million megawatt hours of electricity.

This is almost 18 percent of the U.S. electricity generation and double its production from a decade ago. This significant increase is almost entirely due to the incorporation of additional wind and solar power.

Today, we'll hear good news from our friends in these thriving industries – that there are over 500 American factories building wind turbine parts, that a record 114,000 Americans have jobs supporting the wind industry, and that there currently 250,000 Americans working in the $17 billion solar industry.

It is abundantly clear that consumer demand is already driving increased deployment of these technologies. This is what the industry is good at.

But the private sector can't conduct the fundamental research that lays the foundation for the next generation and the next technology breakthrough.

That means focusing federal programs on innovative technologies that aren't already commercially deployed.

For example, at the Center for Next Generation of Materials Design led by National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), researchers work on advancing computational materials design to discover novel materials.

By pursuing this breakthrough science in materials, we can fundamentally improve the performance of solar energy technologies.

With our national debt at $18 trillion and rising, and mandatory spending caps guiding budgets on everything from energy to national defense, we simply can't afford to increase spending for every program. So we need to focus our efforts on truly groundbreaking research – not on duplicating the efforts of American industry.

By prioritizing fundamental research with broad application to all forms of energy, we can enable the private sector to bring innovative new technology into the market, reduce energy costs, and grow the American economy.

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